United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General welcomes release of American hostage Terry Anderson; will continue work "on private basis", if necessary, for release of remaining German, Israeli and Lebanese hostages and detainees.

- President of Security Council calls it "unacceptable" that safety of members of United Nations peace-keeping operation in Lebanon is endangered; notes with "deep regret" recent killing of Irish UNIFIL soldier and wounding of others.

- Secretary-General appeals to 102 Member States, which owe the United Nations almost $1 billion in unpaid assessments, "to pay now".

- Secretary-General reports that talks between Government of El Salvador and FMLN are under way in Mexico on "intensive, virtually uninterrupted basis"; calls for continued international support.

- Pledging conference for United Nations Palestine Relief Agency receives promised contributions of $149 million.

- Many General Assembly speakers maintain that apartheid still persists in South Africa despite repeal of important legislation.

- World Food Programme Governing body begins meeting in Rome to consider proposals for relief operations and food aid for victims of war, strife and disasters.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar said today that the release of American hostage Terry Anderson, and with that "the closing of the American Chapter", was an "enormous satisfaction" to him, from a humanitarian point of view.

He said his happiness would be total when all of the hostages and detainees were free, including two Germans, the missing Israelis and the over two hundred Lebanese who are detained in the southern part of Lebanon.

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It was his hope that everything would be settled before 31 December. If it was not, he would continue his efforts on a private basis, he said, because "it is a matter of confidence and trust in the person, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar".

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The President of the Security Council, Yuliy M. Vorontsov (Soviet Union) today, in a statement on behalf of Council members, noted with deep regret the recent incident in which one soldier of the Irish contingent of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was killed and others wounded by de facto forces.

The Council President made the statement this afternoon following informal consultations during which the Council considered the special report of the Secretary-General on the incident.

According to the statement, the Council found it "unacceptable" that the safety of members of a United Nations peace-keeping operation was endangered, and urgently called for restraint on the part of all concerned. It further expressed deep concern at the "heightened tension and hostilities" in the UNIFIL area of operation in recent months and the risk to which this had exposed UNIFIL personnel, as well as the Lebanese civilian population in the area.

The Council also conveyed its "deep-felt sympathy and condolences to the Government and people of Ireland and to the bereaved family".

The 15 November incident, in which the Irish soldier was killed, was the 101st casualty suffered by UNIFIL and the 21st such casualty suffered by the Irish contingent. According to the Secretary-General's report, the incident was strongly protested to the Israeli authorities, both locally and in New York.

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The Secretary-General today appealed to the 102 Member States, which, as of 31 October, have failed to meet their financial obligations to the United Nations, and especially "the relatively prosperous economies, to pay now".

He made the appeal during the General Assembly's debate this afternoon on the current financial crisis of the United Nations.

In his statement, the Secretary-General said that even though the situation was well known, member countries had no hesitation in asking the Secretariat to undertake new, complex and challenging activities. "Yesterday, it was Cambodia. Tomorrow it could possibly be Yugoslavia. Will these activities be properly funded" ? Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar asked.

In his report to the Assembly, dated 19 November, on the Organization's financial crisis, the Secretary-General proposed to ask Governments, the

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private sector and individuals to set up a $1 billion Peace Endowment Fund in an effort to solve the problem. He also proposed to charge interests on the amounts of assessed contributions that were not paid in time. Among other proposals, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar suggested the establishment of two Funds each at a level of $ 50 million -- a peace-keeping reserve fund and a humanitarian fund. He also asked for permission to borrow commercially, should other sources of cash be inadequate.

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Negotiations between the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Martí Para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) are currently under way in Mexico on an "intensive, virtually uninterrupted basis", according to Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar.

In his report to the Security Council, dated 2 December, the Secretary-General calls the FMLN's decision to cease offensive operations unilaterally on 16 November "a positive development", as was President Cristiani's rapid, favourable reaction. Armed confrontation appears to have "considerably dwindled" since then, he says.

Both sides have repeatedly affirmed their desire to reach agreement as rapidly as possible on the remaining pending issues, which, the Secretary-General says, are of considerable complexity. In the absence of specific agreements and independent monitoring the situation remains "inherently fragile", he says.

Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar concludes that the strong support of the international community will continue to be needed until a cease-fire is reached and beyond, "in the delicate phase of transition to a durable peace".

The basis for the current talks between the El Salvadorian Government and the FMLN was established by the New York Agreement reached on 25 September.

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A total of $149.1 million has been pledged to the 1992 programmes of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The pledges were made by some 34 countries, including the Holy See, at a meeting yesterday of the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to UNRWA. A number of States promised to announce their contributions at a later date.

Additionally, the Netherlands and the United States pledged $1.7 million and $1 million, respectively, in response to a special appeal by the Commissioner-General concerning Palestinian returnees from the Gulf.

According to the UNRWA report to the General Assembly, planned expenditure for UNRWA's regular programme for the 1992-1993 biennium amounted

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to $572 million. In addition, the cost of maintaining various ongoing programmes for the biennium was set at $30.3 million and was expected to be fully funded by donors during the biennium.

In a statement to the Pledging Conference, General Assembly President Samir S. Shihabi (Saudi Arabia), said that UNWRA had stood as a symbol of the commitment of the international community to provide for the dispersed and dispossessed Palestinian population. He said the need for broad and deep international financial support was greater than ever. Increased support, he added, could be a confidence-building measure during the search for peace.

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Despite changes in South Africa, such as the repeal of important apartheid legislation this year, the practice and consequences of apartheid persists, a number of speakers maintained this morning during the the General Assembly's third day of debate on South Africa's apartheid policies.

Among those addressing the Assembly, the representative of Tanzania, Anthony B. Nyakyi, said any premature relaxation of sanctions could derail the constitutional process. Conservative elements within South Africa must know that the international community was serious in its insistence on the eradication of apartheid.

This view was echoed by other delegations who said that if progress was to be sustained, economic sanctions should not be lifted prematurely. Rather, the relaxation of sanctions should correspond with further steps by the South African Government.

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The Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes -- the governing body of the World Food Programme (WFP) -- began yesterday in Rome its session to consider, among its agenda items, the Programme's major disaster relief operations in the Horn of Africa and the Persian Gulf. The Committee will also consider preparations under way to provide food assistance to 350,000 Cambodians expected to return to their country next year.

During the session, which will conclude on 13 December, the 30-member governing body will consider operations providing food assistance to 6 million destitute, long-term refugees and displaced persons -- victims of protracted crises which, in some cases, have lasted more than a decade, and 20 new or expanded development projects, all but three of them in low-income, food deficit countries.

The WFP is the largest source of multilateral development aid for developing countries, after the World Bank, and the largest source of multilateral food assistance for emergencies.

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